

National Wages vs. Utah Wages



Not One Nation Under Wages

by Mark Knold

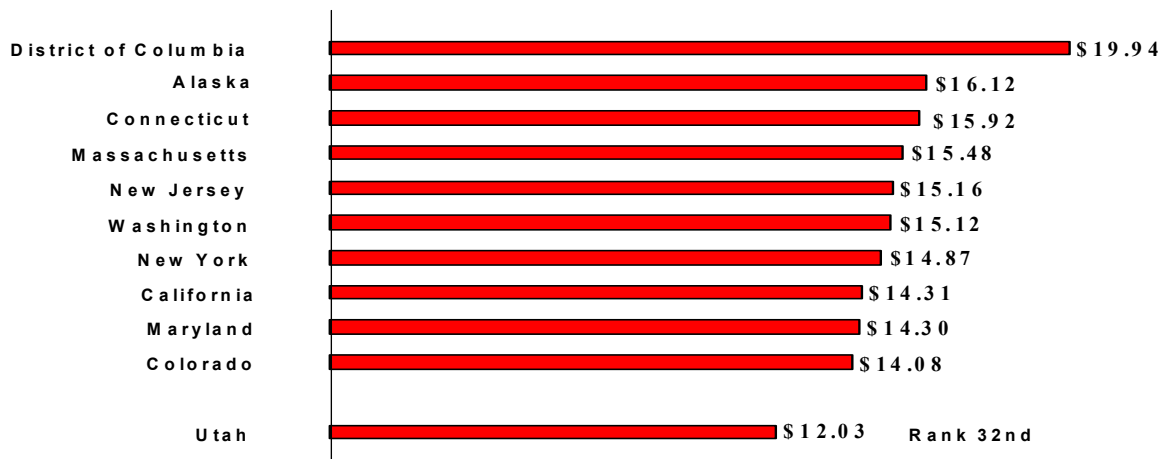
One fact of life is that wage levels by occupation vary throughout the United States. Engineers receive a higher hourly wage in California than they do in Mississippi. Computer-related occupations enjoy some of their highest wages in the northeastern United States. Differences like these can be found across all occupations and all regions.

Utah is known as a state with lower-than-average wages. Is this true? In most occupations

it is true. But what if we look at median wages instead of average wages? After all, averages can be skewed by extremes. Using the median measurement eliminates this effect. So does that change the picture? No, not much.

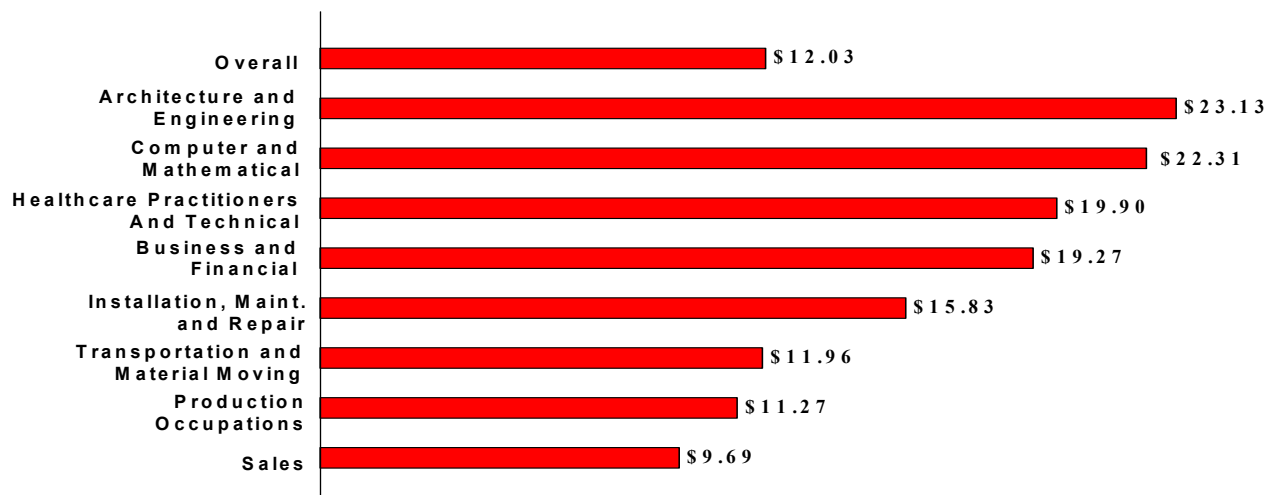
So how does Utah look against the United States' median hourly wage of \$13.01? Utah's \$12.03 median is 8 percent lower. In a ranking of all states and the District of Columbia, Utah ranks 32nd out of 51. What about the western states?

Hourly Median Wage Top Ten States and Utah



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Median Wage for Selected Utah Occupational Categories



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Only six of them — Alaska, Colorado, California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington — have median wages higher than the nation's median. Below the national median, and continuing the western ordering, is Nevada and Arizona, and then Utah.

States near Utah in ranking include Texas, North Carolina, Missouri, and Maine. Prominent states below Utah include Florida, Kentucky, and Tennessee. The United States wage profile is a hodgepodge that is solely determined by economic forces in the market. Utah's wages, and all area's wages, are what they are because that's what works in that market. It's up to the individual to decide whether they can live in that market.

Computer-related occupations are a new and growing part of the economy. How does Utah look here? This is one of Utah's better-paying areas at \$22.31 per hour, but nationally, this is a low ranking (43rd). This computer stuff pays its biggest bucks in coastal states like Massachusetts, New Jersey, California, Washington, and the District of Columbia. Only Utah's neighbor, Colorado, offers wages equal to these big players.

Where does Utah have its best ranking? In transportation occupations. An hourly wage of \$11.96 ranks 11th nationally, although unfortunately, this is an area with wages below the national median. Utah has some of its best national rankings in occupational categories that pay below the national median.

What about healthcare? After all, this is a fast-growing industry and one facing a skills shortage. Utah's median is \$19.90 per hour and ranks 29th nationally. Healthcare is a competitive industry experiencing a skills shortage nationwide, and Utah is no different.

The bottom line is Utah's wages work for Utah. If they don't, the market will make adjustments accordingly.

<http://stats.bls.gov/oes/home.htm#tables>